

The Central Intelligence Agency Today

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by James H. Taylor, Executive Director, CIA



It is a great pleasure to meet with such a supportive and friendly group.

It is also, I should point out, distressing to look out at all those relaxed, stress-free faces.

I know that all of you still have many friends and some of you have children or other relatives at the Agency. I hope that your years of experience with us gives you the ability to take press and other accounts of our activities with a big grain of salt. If you had access only to the press, you might believe that some of the following incidents or circumstances widely reported in the media are indicative of the near decline and fall of the Central Intelligence Agency. For example—the Rewald affair in Honolulu with the associated erroneous ABC report that we were guilty of calling for the murder of an American citizen. Or the various reports that people on Capitol Hill haven't been told what it is that we are really doing out at Langley. And, of course, the continuing saga of what we are or aren't doing, or are or are not responsible for, in most any place in the world—depending on the day of the week.

This is not to say that we don't need to be concerned about many things:

—Internally, we worry about the relative inexperience of too many of our people. The situation improves with almost every day that passes, but too many of our components still have too many relatively inexperienced, recently recruited employees—a legacy of our past roller-coaster contraction and expansion.

—We worry about whether the important and substantial investment program we have underway will continue to be

supported in the Executive Branch and Congress.

—We worry about the apparent continuing public appetite for sensationalist and irresponsible journalism which too often puts us on the defensive and has us explaining ourselves on Capitol Hill.

—We worry about the enthusiasm too much of our media share about the desirability of exposing national security information, and about the continuing decline in respect for the confidentiality so necessary to the continuance of our profession.

Fortunately lots of good things are underway, most of which aren't adequately reported on in the media. (Don't misunderstand, I'm not seeking coverage.) The most important of these has been the continuing revitalization of the Agency you served over so many years. Under Bill Casey's leadership, we are doing three very important things: First, we have substantially restored the personnel manning levels so significantly reduced during the decade of the 70's. Second, we are more than half-way into a considerable reinvestment program, a program of rebuilding all of the tools that let us do our job, including computers, communications and, of course, most visible of all, our physical plant. Finally, we are working to improve the *esprit* and can-do spirit which has always served us so well.

So it is clear that despite what we continue to see in the media, despite some destructive and negative forces, there is a lot of real support in the Executive Branch and in the Congress from those who wish to help us get what we need to do our job. (Congress is right now reviewing the 1986 program and, of course, it is possible that the very supportive environment we have had for the last few years will not continue. But the jury is still out, and we remain convinced—and the evidence is in our favor—that all our most important requirements will continue to be met.)

We have done other important things recently which have not been reported in the newspapers. Let me just mention two here from the support area. I refer first to taking over, from GSA, management of our building, making us responsible for our own physical plant. Month by month we are slowly getting adjusted to heating and air conditioning and elevators *that work*. You may find this trivial—some of you who did your best to keep our physical plant in good shape may even find it unbelievable—but it is having a demonstrable impact on your Agency and the morale of its people.

Second, I would note our new guard force. Have any of you driven through our gates in the last few days? Have you noticed the change? The very alert and interested faces? Again, some may scoff that this is not important. They're making a big mistake. Steps like this have a direct and positive impact on every one of us every day. I think everyone who drives through our gates feels a renewed

sense of pride in our organization.

Lots of other good things are going on. Many of you are familiar with a book called "In Search of Excellence," by Tom Peters. Bill Casey has been much bitten with the excellence bug and has asked the whole organization to consider how we can improve all aspects of our work. I'm impressed with the resulting new spirit of questioning—questioning our well-honed procedures and methods and approaches to see whether they can once again be improved. I think this is good. I think it reflects maturity and an understanding that, no matter how good we are, we can always be better.

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I don't need to talk to you about the rapid pace of change in the world. Some of the other things we have underway these days are designed to help us lead and motivate our able, experienced, dedicated, smart and professional employees to be able to deal flexibly with the rapidly changing problems that we confront. This takes me to another area where some experimentation is underway. We are experimenting with a concept called "banding"—a different way of classifying, compensating and rewarding our people. We have an experiment underway involving nearly 1,000 people. The basic approach, based on work done by the Navy, involves the substitution of a new pay scale for the traditional GS scale and a program somewhat like merit pay in which people are rewarded more directly for their performance. The results aren't in. But we are much impressed with the potential this new system offers to help us retain and reward our people, something we feel is of intense importance as we witness continual questioning of the value of federal service.

We are much interested in this new idea, because it is part of our attention to the larger question of how we recruit and retain America's brightest young people for our critically important profession. Another aspect of this compensation issue for us, of course, is the numerous ideas under consideration which would change the Federal retirement system. We have no problem with change. And we'll willingly do our part to help reduce the cost of government. But we are very much concerned about our ability to recruit and retain the high-quality people we need—the foundation upon which everything we do ultimately rests. We cannot permit the adoption of a retirement system which significantly reduces our ability to find and hold America's finest young people.

I would like to share with you a small thing I am doing in order to keep an eye on the quality, enthusiasm and commitment of our new recruits. I hear—we all hear—lots of talk that the young kids aren't made of the same stuff all of us were. I don't believe it. Once a week I make it a point

to sit down and privately talk to someone who has recently come to work for us, to get a sense of why they're with us and what they want. I've got good news. They are as excited by the sense of serving their country, of working with committed, enthusiastic and competent people, as any of us. My message is: We're doing fine, and the young people who are coming to work with us look to me like they're going to work to ensure that we continue to do well.

I know Bob Magee talked to you in February, and he apparently convinced you that you could help us in the recruitment business. We can never have enough help in this area. We welcome the effort you are making and encourage you to keep at it.

Of course, we can't talk much here about operations, overseas service, or substantive accomplishment. I hope you can believe our conviction that we are serving our customers' needs as well as we ever have and, in some areas, better than we ever have. I think, in spite of some of the concerns we all have, that our output is of uniformly high quality, that we do understand our very complex world in great depth, and that we are successful—daily—in placing critical and comprehensive intelligence on the widest range of issues we have ever worked on into policymakers' hands. More important than what I think, this is what we continue to hear from all those whom we serve.

The major challenges we face over the next couple of years are not dissimilar from those you saw in your years with us: Finding enough high-quality new people to maintain a healthy and vital organization; reducing our media exposure; monitoring short-sighted proposals to save money in the federal service at the expense of our long-term capabilities; carrying out the substantive, technical, analytical and operational jobs the country expects us to do with our customary honesty, integrity and quality; and continuing to stress to all who will listen the great importance of intelligence to our country. Most important of all, we must continue to help all those who make the key decisions about our country to understand the issues, forces and opportunities which confront us.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I also want to assure you that we very much welcome your continued enthusiasm and support.

